The Exquisite Historical Precision Of The Biblical Account

שלשה דברים לא שינו ישראל במצרים , שמותם ומלבושם ולשונם

Many archaeologists and scholars have spoken out against the objections of Biblical criticism and dedicated themselves to demonstrating the historical precision and credibility of the Book of Books. Whether through new archaeological discoveries which corroborate the biblical narrative –which are becoming more numerous and more solid– or through textual arguments.

Let’s first see some examples of this second type of argument.

TEXTUAL CORROBORATION

The Tora tells us that Yosef, son of Ya’aqob, was sold as a slave by his brothers to merchants who took him to Egypt. After a dramatic story of false accusations, imprisonment, an encounter with Pharaoh and the interpretation of his mysterious dreams, Yosef is elevated to the position of Vizier (Prime Minister) of Egypt. Yosef is an excellent administrator, saves Egypt from ruin, and leads the Pharaonic empire to a great prosperity.

To evaluate the corroboration of any ancient text, historians confront the text with its historical context. An author of the year 1000 who pretends to pass as the author of a text of the year 500 will not be able to capture the context with the fidelity of the real author of the year 500. Involuntarily, but inevitably, the apocryphal author will fail while presenting some details of the story, revealing thus his real time and his geography. On the other hand, when a text is confronted with the context and culture of its time, and the details prove to be genuine, the text is considered authentic.

Researchers have analyzed the Biblical text in this manner and demonstrated the Tora's exquisite precision with respect to its historical setting and context.
One of these researchers is the archaeologist and Egyptologist Kenneth Kitchen, born in 1932 and author of the famous book: "On the reliability of the Old testament" . l will mention now one of the many examples Kitchen presents to illustrate this methodology.

HOW MUCH WAS PAID FOR YOSEF?

In antiquity, slavery was common, and there was an international market value for slaves. Kitchen shows that the price of slaves in Shekalim, an international currency in the Middle East, fluctuated over time. Around the year 2000 before the common era, the price of a slave was 10 shekels. Later, around 1750 BCE, the price of a slave in international markets increased to 20 shekels. In 1500 the slaves were bought for 30 shekels. And in the year 750 for 50 shekels. According to the traditional calculations, Yosef lived around the year 1750. Moshe, around 1500. According to biblical criticism the story of Yosef and the Exodus was written in the year 750 BCE. The Tora mentions that the price that was paid for Yosef was 20 shekels, exactly the amount of money that was paid in the international market at that specific time. (Bereshit 39:28) And when the Tora speaks of the redemption of slaves (Shemot 21:32) in the time of Moshe, around 1500 BCE, the Torah mentions that the price of a slave was 30 shekels. In the year 750 BCE when King Menahem rescues the Jews enslaved by the Assyrians, he paid 50 shekels per slave (Kings 2: 15:20).Kitchen shows in this way the absence of anachronisms in the Bible – common in apocryphal texts. In the Biblical account the numbers are very accurate, and compatible with different historical periods.

YOSEF'S INSTALLATION

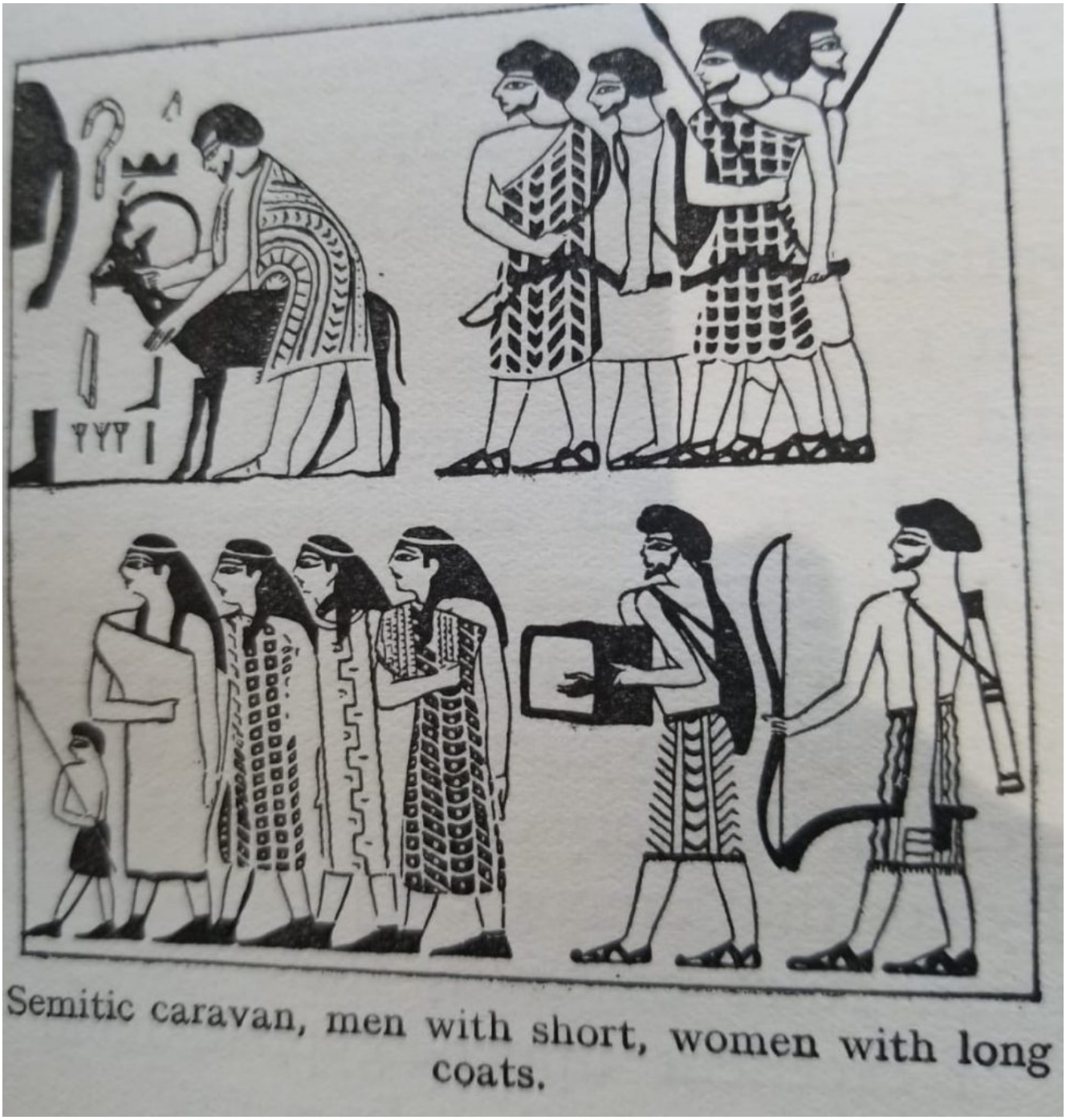
A somewhat similar method is that used I think for the first

time by the great (but unfortunately unknown) orientalist, philologist and egyptologist Abraham Yehuda, a Sephardic Jew born in Baghdad 1877.
Let’s see some examples that Yehuda mentions in the story of Yosef.
The Tora tells in Bereshit 41 that when removed from prison Yosef was shaved. Yahuda explains that shaving entirely the face and head was a typically Egyptian custom (according to my tour guide in my last visit to the Egyptian gallery in the Met, Egyptians shaved their head to protect themselves from the intense heat and insects). Semites, however, grew their hair and their beard. But when a Semite or another foreigner had to come and present himself before the King, had to look presentable, for a Hebrew that mean: clean shaved.
Similarly, semites, like Yosef, wore robes made of colored fabric, which covered the entire body while Egyptians wore plain, white or transparent tunics that covered half body (see illustrations). Egyptian dignitaries wore linen tunics, as the Tora mentions with Yosef.
At the time of his coronation Pharaoh gives Yosef a ring, dresses him with a gold necklace and then, as was customary in Egypt, Yosef was paraded in a Royal Carriage to be officially installed in his new position.
An Egyptian that served as a government official needs to have a title of nobility, which was inherited from father to son, or obtained by marriage. At the time of his installation Pharaoh marries Yosef with Asenat daughter of the priest of On for this very purpose, following strict Egyptian protocol.
Finally, when Pharaoh designates Yosef as Vizier Yosef goes through a process of “naturalization”. Pharaoh changed his name from Yosef to Tsafenat Pa’aneah, a typically Egyptian name that according to Yahuda means “The feeder for all Egypt. “

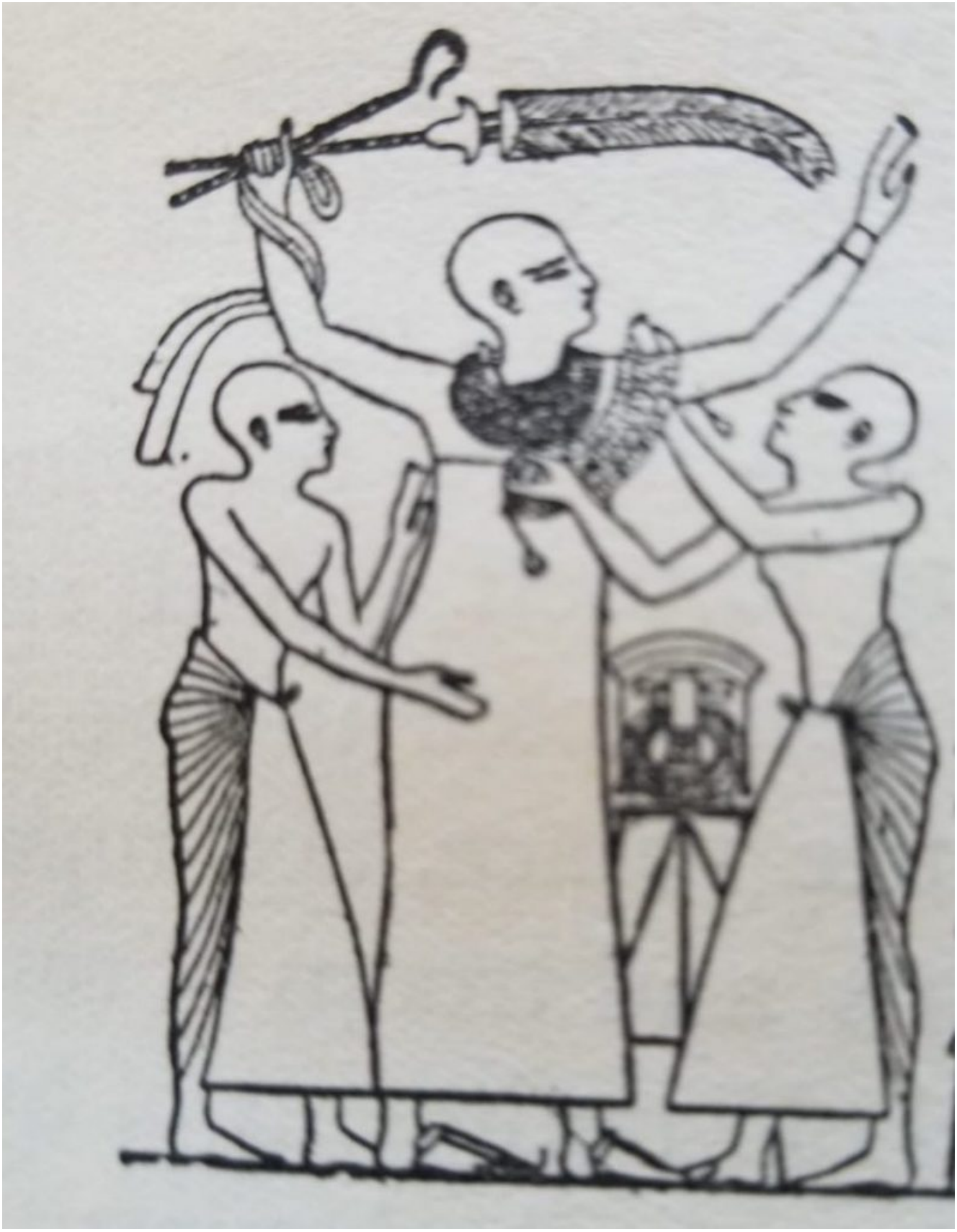
Yehuda presents all these facts and many more in great detail and presents some illustrations of these formal ceremonies with drawings and Egyptian reliefs of the time, to show the exquisite precision and historical accuracy of the biblical

story.

To be continued



Semitic immigrants arriving in Egypt. Could this be the way Yosef’s brothers and their families looked when arriving to Egypt?



Ceremony of coronation of a Vizier. Shaved, dressed with white linen and receiving a gold necklace, as it is said of Yosef.

The royal carriage introducing the dignitaries to the people